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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1944.

Subject: "MEAT FOR YOUR FREEZER LOCKER." Information from meat specialists of U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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About this time of the year, many homemakers are finding that the fruit and vegetables they put in their freezer lockers last summer are beginning to dwindle noticeably. And since you don't want any valuable locker space going to waste, the meat specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture suggest that now is a good time to freeze a supply of meat for the spring and summer.

If you have a freezer locker in your community you can probably get enough meat to freeze in quantity...because even though only current ration stamps are good in buying meat from a retail market, when you buy meat from a farmer you can use meat stamps that are not yet valid in the retail stores. As it is still slaughtering time on the farm, chances are good you can get a side of pork or beef to fill up those empty spaces in your freezer locker.

Before going ahead with your meat freezing, plan a meat budget to fit your family and your locker space. It's helpful at this point to know how much trimmed meat you can expect from the various kinds of livestock. Lamb gives the highest percentage of trimmed meat, ready for the kitchen-- you can expect to get back trimmed meat equal to about 90 percent of the carcass weight. Beef and veal trim down to about 80 percent of the carcass weight...pork, to about 70 percent on ham, bacon, and loin, with 10 to 12 percent more of rendered lard.

An important point when you're planning to freeze meat is the storage temperature of your locker. The meat specialists recommend a temperature of zero degrees Fahrenheit. At zero provided the meat is well wrapped--you can expect beef to keep six months to a year...lamb and veal, six to nine months...fresh pork,

three to six months or probably even longer...and sausage or ground meat, one to three months.

But at temperatures higher than zero, meat won't hold its fine flavor. The higher the storage temperature, the more quickly pork fat becomes strong and beef loses some of its flavor. Due to a variety of wartime conditions, some home-size freezers and even locker rooms are not kept colder than 15 degrees F. If this is true of your locker, don't let it discourage you from freezing meat-- simply plan on keeping the meat a shorter period, and cut down the amount you freeze at one time so you'll be sure to use it all before it can lose quality. Also, sample your meat carefully as you use it, to determine the best storage period under your conditions. Temperatures above 15 degrees F. are rarely satisfactory--some mold may grow at these higher temperatures.

When you select an animal for meat, choose one that's moderately fattened, and of a weight to give cuts of meat of the size you prefer. Make sure you get a clean job of slaughtering, and after slaughter, see that the meat's promptly chilled at about 33 to 36 degrees F.--but avoid freezing it, if possible. As soon as pork and veal are chilled, cut and package the meat and freeze it immediately. Beef and lamb need a little different treatment. If you let them age a short time, enzymes in the meat soften the connective tissue and make the meat more tender. So let beef and lamb hang in the chilling room a short time before you cut and freeze them. Five days' ageing is enough for lean meat--if the meat is protected with a layer of fat, it can age up to ten days. Longer ageing periods aren't necessary.

Frozen meat needs good wrapping to prevent it from drying out and losing flavor and food value. Use a vaporproof wrapping and then, if you like, wrap again in an outer layer of heavier paper, such as butcher paper, to protect the inner wrap from getting torn or punctured. Don't use butcher paper next to the meat--it sticks... it doesn't prevent drying...and it may give the meat an off-flavor.

If your locker's some distance from home, a special container is helpful in keeping the meat from thawing while you're bringing it home. It's easy to make an insulated box for this purpose: set a carton inside another larger carton, and fill the space between them with excelsior, chopped paper, cottonseed hulls, or composition board. If you don't have a box protect the frozen meat with several wrappings of newspaper.

You'll probably bring home several days' supply of frozen meat at one time. If you have room for it in the ice cube compartment of your refrigerator, it will keep there a week or two...temperatures of ice cube compartments are usually above 15 degrees F. so don't keep the meat too long.

It's not necessary to thaw meat before cooking it, but if you cook it unthawed, allow more time. At the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, meat scientists found that a rolled beef roast, cooked medium, needs 32 minutes a pound if thawed before cooking, and 57 minutes a pound if it's put in the oven while still frozen. Use a moderate temperature--350 degrees F. or lower--when you cook, roast, or broil frozen meat.

If you prefer to thaw frozen meat before cooking, leave it in the refrigerator --but not in the freezing compartment--and let it thaw slowly so it will have a chance to re-absorb the meat juices. At refrigerator temperature, a four-pound roast thaws in about 30 hours. After you've thawed frozen meat, cook it as though it had never been frozen. Cook meat thawed in the refrigerator within a day or two after thawing is complete...but cook meat thawed at air temperature at once.